

# Quest of the Nobleman.

There were few harder headed men than Rufus Bateson, the iron man, and few softer headed girls than Anastasia, his daughter. Chicago was proud of both of them, for the former represented the power of the purse in an economical degree, and the latter was a social society queen she had attained her majority. Rufus was worth millions, while Anastasia was "worth the world," her many admirers were wont to declare, and if personal beauty and the fact of her being an only child, and therefore a great heiress, aggregated to such a value, they were right. But a day came when Anastasia made a fresh admirer of her value, and all agreed—with the one exception of Cyril Raymond, the rich pork packer's son—that, far from being "worth the world," she was not even worth attention.

In this interval Anastasia had been to Europe, had been presented at court, had spoken with princes and nobles, and had listened to such soft flatteries from gilded infants abroad that the rough sincerity of her old friends at home seemed detestable when she and her father returned to their lake-front mansion.

Miss Bateson had found an ambition in England and brought it back with her to Chicago. That ambition was to marry a title, after the present fashion of American heiresses. She had seen American duchesses, American marchionesses and American countesses, the favorites of London society, and she hungered, thirsted, pleaded and prayed for her father to buy her a nobleman. Yes, she did not blink the terrible truth that it was only her father's millions that could obtain her the coveted honor. She did not ask for love, or admiration or devotion; all she wanted was a title.

"I don't aspire so high as to ask to become a princess or a duchess, as so many American girls have done," she pleaded with her father; "no, I don't want to be unreasonable; let me be simply a countess and I'll be content." Rufus Bateson was such a stern man that it was said of him that the iron he worked had entered his soul, but he had never carried that sternness into his home until now. He turned upon her with a wrath that she had never seen him stirred to before and swore he would rather see her dead at his feet than sold to a titled puppet not worth his salt.

Those were trying days for both father and daughter. The more copious were Anastasia's tears, the more merciless was the parent. "What is the matter with Miss Bateson?" asked young Cyril Raymond of the ironmaster one afternoon about this time, when they happened to meet in the city. "I saw her out driving yesterday in South Park and she hardly acknowledged my bow, and how pale she looks."

Mr. Bateson then confided to Cyril the secret of Anastasia's coldness and pallor and the young man went away sorely troubled in heart, for up to the time of Miss Bateson's leaving for Europe he had treasured hopes of one day winning the heiress for himself.

No wonder that when the young bloods of Chicago became acquainted with the sad news that Anastasia Bateson had caught the prevailing infection and now hankered after a title, they said to themselves she was not worth attention.

Cyril Raymond thought differently, however. He thought he had seen further into the depths of Anastasia's heart than others had done, perhaps; and as he recalled the many tender responses she had given to words of affectionate meaning that he had spoken to her in the ante-Europe period, he could not and would not believe that this yearning of hers was more than a passing mood, and he told her father so.

A few days later Cyril saw Mr. Bateson again and made a certain proposition to him—something with reference to Anastasia, for her name frequently cropped up—and when the young man took his leave the ironmaster shook him heartily by the hand and said: "Very well; we'll try it; we can bid farewell when you're ready."

"Shall we say Thursday afternoon?" "Yes; that'll do."

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The earl, still holding Mr. Bateson's arm, bowed and murmured something about being "honored, my lord."

"I am most happy to meet you, my lord," said the girl, though the words belied her, for the nobleman was so weak and decrepit a creature that beside him Cyril Raymond looked a sturdy giant. Alas, her dreams had been of something more poetic than Earl Falconer. He was not like the nobleman she had seen in England, but then, most of them had been married and were men of fame as well as title. She remembered having heard her mother say, this very year she died, that it was only the broken-down nobles that came to America, and, from a physical point of view, this earl her father had brought to see her was broken down indeed. He had a stiff left knee, wore a patch over his right eye, and walked with a stick that might almost be regarded as a crutch.

Two or three times the earl attempted to say something complimentary, but each time was prevented by a violent fit of coughing.

That cough of yours is troublesome, my lord," said Cyril, commiseratingly.

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